

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SENIOR SERVICES
H1N1 Virus, Also Known as Swine Flu
Questions & Answers

What is H1N1?

H1N1 virus, also known as swine flu, is a recently detected illness in humans caused by the swine influenza H1N1 virus. Persons with H1N1 have symptoms similar to those caused by seasonal flu.

This virus has been referred to as swine flu because laboratory testing showed that many of the genes in this new virus were very similar to flu viruses that normally occur in pigs. However, further study has shown that it is very different from the virus that normally circulates in pigs. It has two genes from flu viruses that normally circulate in pigs, but it also has genes from flu viruses that normally circulate in birds and other genes from flu that normally afflicts humans. Scientists call this a “quadruple reassortant” virus.

This new virus was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009. The virus has infected people over 100 countries, including Mexico and Canada.

Are there human infections with the H1N1 virus in the U.S.?

Yes, for the current count, see <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>

Are there human infections with H1N1 in Missouri?

Yes, for the latest number, go to http://www.dhss.mo.gov/BT_Response/SwineFlu09.html

Is this swine flu, also known as H1N1, virus contagious?

H1N1 virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. However, at this time, it is not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

What are the signs and symptoms of H1N1 in people?

The symptoms of H1N1 in people are similar to the symptoms of the regular human flu that arrives in the fall and pesters us each winter. Symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. A significant number of people who have been infected with the swine flu virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting. Like seasonal flu, swine flu (H1N1) may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions. Possible complications include pneumonia and difficulty breathing.

The high risk groups for complications of H1N1 are not known at this time. People at higher risk of serious complications from seasonal flu include people age 65 years and older, children younger than 5 years old, pregnant women, people of any age with chronic medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease.

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How do you catch the H1N1 virus?

Spread of the H1N1 virus is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people who have the illness. People also can become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their eyes, mouth or nose.

Are there medicines to treat H1N1?

Medicines are available to treat persons with H1N1, especially those with more severe illness. The person's health care provider can determine whether specific treatment is necessary. The H1N1 virus can be treated with one of two antiviral medicines, either oseltamivir, which is sold under the trade name Tamiflu[®], or zanamivir, sold under the trade name Relenza[®]. These are prescription medicines. They fight the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in the person's body. They work best when started within two days of the onset of symptoms. They can make the illness milder and make the person feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications.

How long can an infected person spread H1N1 influenza to others?

It is currently believed that persons with the H1N1 virus may be contagious from one day before they develop symptoms until up to seven days after they get sick. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods. In general, individuals with swine flu should stay home and not go into the community except to seek medical care for at least seven days after their illness begins, even if they feel better sooner. Persons who are still sick seven days after they become ill should continue to stay home until at least 24 hours after they have recovered.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

There is no vaccine available to protect against the H1N1 virus. But everyday actions can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza. Take these steps to protect your health:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective if soap and water are not available.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. If no tissue is available, cough or sneeze into your sleeve.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get the flu, the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services strongly recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you live in areas where people have been confirmed as having swine flu and you become ill with flu-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people except to seek medical care.

Cases reported to the Missouri Dept. of Health and Senior Services are updated weekly
Cases reported to the CDC and WHO are updated weekly

If you have severe illness or you are at high risk for flu complications, contact your health care provider or seek medical care. Your health care provider will determine whether flu testing and/or treatment is needed

If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care.

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve, but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

Can I get H1N1 (swine flu) from eating or preparing pork?

No. Swine flu, also known as H1N1, viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get swine flu (H1N1) from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

How can I gain additional information?

To learn more about the H1N1 virus, and for more details on the state and federal investigations, please visit Missouri's H1N1 web site at www.dhss.mo.gov/BT_Response/SwineFlu09.html, and see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention fact sheet entitled "H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) and You" at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/qa.htm>.